

Levine, Amy-Jill and Douglas Knight. *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us.* New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Chapter Three

Though brief, this chapter is important because it describes the geography of Israel/Palestine. So, Levine and Knight discuss the Levant and the topography of the land which consists of six discernable regions:

- The Coastal Plain
- The Shephelah
- The Hill Country
- The Jordan Rift Valley
- The Eastern Hills
- And the Negev

Along with a description of each of these regions recourse is made to Scripture in order to provide the reader biblical context.

Levine and Knight then take the reader to the well, so to speak, and explain Israel's climate and water resources.

Scholars have researched evidence about water levels, plant and pollen remains, animal bones, soils and sediments, and so on and have concluded that the climate during biblical times was very similar to the climatic conditions prevailing today (p. 91).

Next, the settlement in the land is dated to about 1200 BCE and the sorts of villages and cities in which the inhabitants would have lived are sorted through. K. and L. insist that the Israelites didn't establish cities until around 900, or at the beginning of Iron II (p. 96). The archaeological evidence certainly supports them on this point.

And finally, K. and L. also describe the agricultural abundance of the land, made famous in the phrase 'a land flowing with milk and honey'. They note that

The description highlights the fertility of the land: milk and honey are two food products that can be consumed without necessitating the death or inhibiting the growth of their source (p. 97).

While seemingly unimportant, a good grasp of the Land is utterly inescapable for the student wishing to comprehend the lives and locations of the persons described in Scripture. Readers prone to skip such materials would do well to suppress that inclination: this chapter has much to contribute to the ‘world’ of the Bible.

The end of this chapter also means the end of this section of the book. In Part Two, Levine and Knight will begin investigations of such matters as Law, the Divine, the Cult, Creation and Chaos, as well as ‘Continuation and Completion’.

To those chapters we turn next.

Jim West
Quartz Hill School of Theology